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RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 0046
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM 5708
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 0025
RUEHLGB/AMEMBASSY KIGALI 1656
RUEHDJ/AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI 0252
RUEHAE/AMEMBASSY ASMARA 3880
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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: DEMARCHE ON DISTRACTED DRIVING

REF: STATE 00006703

¶1. (U) Regional Environment Officer (REO) and Regional Environment Assistant (REA) delivered subject demarche to Dr. Kebede Worku, Ethiopia's State Minister of Health, on Thursday, February 4, 2010. Dr. Kebede agreed that distracted driving stemming from cell phone usage and texting while driving is a problem that contributes to traffic accidents. A law prohibiting cell phone use in the Addis Ababa area was passed recently in order to address the problem, but it is too early to report results.

¶2. (U) Dr. Kebede did not have access to traffic-related hospitalization statistics, but agreed to contact the Medical Services Directorate to inquire whether their hospitalization records identify victims of distracted driving-related accidents. In his capacity as State Health Minister, he noted that many traffic accidents in Ethiopia result in bone fractures where victims may spend several months in hospitals, thereby burdening health delivery systems. Moreover, it was Dr. Kebede's understanding that over 50 percent of orthopedic beds in hospitals are filled with traffic accident victims.

¶3. (U) Dr. Kebede also highlighted that a bill is close to approval that will mandate the creation of a safety coordination office to be housed under the Ministry of Transport and Communication. The safety coordination office' governing body will include officials from relevant ministries, insurance company representatives, and other relevant stakeholders and it will play a role in awareness campaigns.

#YATES